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## ECUADOR AFTER CORREA: THE STRUGGLE OVER THE “CITIZENS’ REVOLUTION”\*

*Ecuador después de Correa: la lucha por la “Revolución Ciudadana”*

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### ABSTRACT

The year 2017 in Ecuador has been marked, first, by the electoral victory of *Alianza PAIS* and, then, by the rapidly escalating conflict within the governing party. With the departure from office of Rafael Correa, who had governed the country since 2007, Ecuadorian politics has entered a new period which is characterized by political realignments and heightened political uncertainty. At the same time, the economic situation is improving only gradually and imposes significant constraints on the new government led by Lenín Moreno. The article reviews the politically turbulent year of 2017, and, in doing so, analyzes the struggle over the legacy of the “Citizens’ Revolution” that has broken out between the supporters of the new president and the followers of his predecessor.

**Keywords:** Ecuador, Lenín Moreno, Rafael Correa, elections, democracy

### RESUMEN

*El año 2017 en el Ecuador ha sido caracterizado, primero, por la victoria electoral de Alianza PAIS y, después, por el conflicto dentro del partido oficialista que se ha agudizado rápidamente. Con la salida de la presidencia de Rafael Correa —quien había gobernado el país desde 2007— la política ecuatoriana ha entrado a una nueva fase que se caracteriza por realineamientos políticos y una incrementada incertidumbre política. Al mismo tiempo, la situación económica sigue siendo difícil, imponiendo restricciones importantes al nuevo gobierno de Lenín Moreno. En el artículo se revisará el turbulento año 2017, poniendo énfasis en la lucha por la “Revolución Ciudadana” que se está dando entre los seguidores del nuevo presidente y los partidarios de su predecesor.*

**Palabras clave:** Ecuador, Lenín Moreno, Rafael Correa, elecciones, democracia

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## I. INTRODUCTION

When Lenín Moreno narrowly won the run-off elections in April 2017, the general expectation was one of continuity. As vice president during Rafael Correa's first term in office and candidate of the governing party *Alianza PAIS*, Moreno represented the continuation of the "Citizens' Revolution," in contrast to opposition candidate Guillermo Lasso of the center-right alliance CREO-SUMA who, both politically and personally, stood for a return to the pre-Correa era (Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 10-14). During the campaign, Moreno had already signaled that he would do things differently than his predecessor and, in particular, had promised corrections to Correa's confrontational if not authoritarian style of governing.<sup>1</sup> Yet, few observers, if any, expected relations between the two politicians to deteriorate as quickly and dramatically as they did—almost as soon as Moreno replaced Correa in Quito's Palacio de Carondelet (Labarthe and Saint-Upéry 2017: 29-30; Ospina 2017a: 4; De la Torre 2018). During the second half of 2017, the governing *Alianza PAIS* effectively split into two camps and, in early 2018, Correa and his followers left the party to build a new political movement that was supposed to defend the Citizens' Revolution (*Movimiento Revolución Ciudadana*). When, in February 2018, Ecuadorians were again asked to vote in a referendum called by Lenín Moreno, it was basically the Correístas that opposed the government, while the original opposition largely supported the new president (Ramírez 2018; Wray 2018).

In reviewing the politically turbulent year of 2017 in Ecuador, this article analyzes this struggle over the legacy of the Citizens' Revolution. In addition to recapitulating key political, economic, and social developments, the article will specifically discuss the dynamics, the meaning, and the (potential) consequences of this struggle for Ecuador.

## II. 2017: A YEAR IN REVIEW

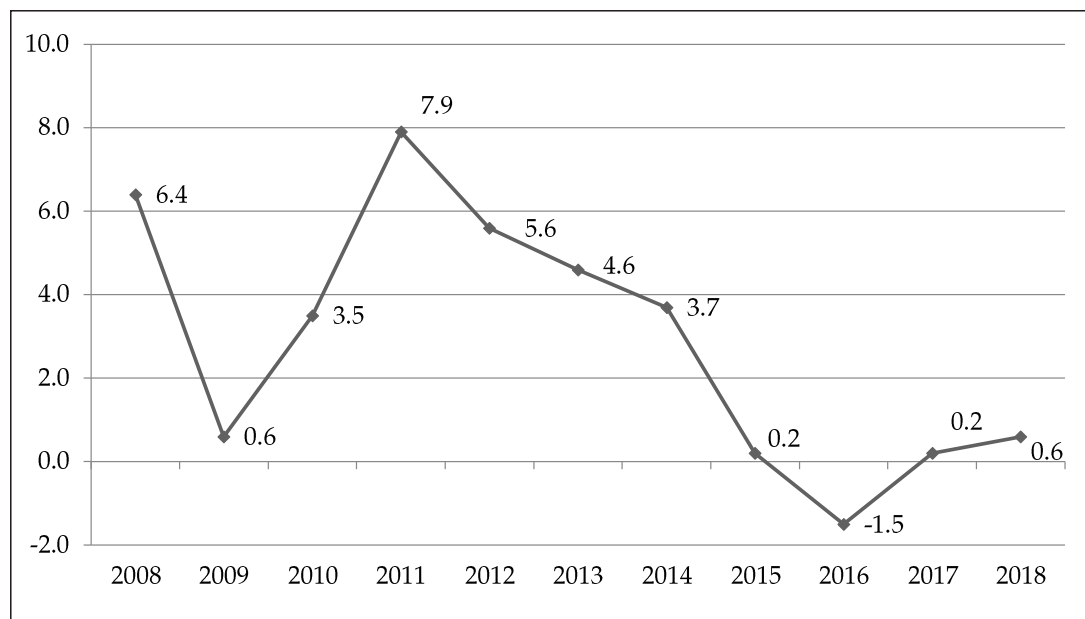
### The economy

Enabled by a certain recovery of the oil price, Ecuador's economy has stabilized on a low level (Figure 1). Still, a twin deficit—of both the current account and the budget—returned in 2017. According to IMF estimates, Ecuador's current account—which had briefly turned positive in 2016—closed 2017 at -0.7% of GDP (IMF 2017). Ecuador's fiscal deficit has continued to widen and, in 2017, reached 6% of GDP (BBC 2017b, reporting World Bank data). President Moreno has continued to reduce public spending and has started to openly talk about austerity measures, even if he promised to exempt social spending from any

<sup>1</sup> On Correa's confrontational rhetoric and authoritarian style of governing, see for instance Conaghan (2017), De la Torre (2013, 2016), Freidenberg (2012), Pachano (2010), and Rojas and Llanos-Escobar (2016).

budget cuts (El Universo 2017a; Labarthe and Saint-Upéry 2017: 36-37). But expenditures remained higher than fiscal income and, thus, public debt has continued to increase (CEPAL 2018b: 16). In fact, the state of the economy has been one of the key issues over which Moreno and his predecessor have been arguing in the course of 2017. While Correa has argued that he left “the table served” (*la mesa servida*), meaning that he handed over an economy in good shape to his successor, the new head of state has emphasized the serious economic difficulties that he has inherited (Labarthe and Saint-Upéry 2017: 31; see also El Universo 2017a). Moreno’s criticism, in particular, referred to the level of public debt which, according to new estimates, was much higher than the 27.7% declared by the Correa government and, at 59%, significantly surpassed the legal limit of 40% of GDP (Labarthe and Saint-Upéry 2017: 34-35).

Figure 1. Real GDP growth: Ecuador 2008-2018



Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF). 2017: Estimate; 2018: Projection.

In terms of economic policy, President Moreno has sent ambivalent signals (see Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 27; Ospina 2017b: 8-9). On the one hand, he made overtures to the private sector by including business representatives in his National Dialogue and by relaunching free trade negotiations with the United States (see El Comercio 2017d, 2018e). Also, the government included a question on whether to revoke the tax on extraordinary capital gains (*Ley de Plusvalía*) in the referendum of February 2018 (see below). As was to be expected, a majority of the population voted against this very contested tax, which the business sector had described as constraining investment in construction. While the Correístas painted these moves as signaling a return to neoliberal recipes, they have basically reinforced a trend of rapprochement with the country’s business elites that had already begun under the Correa government (Wolff 2016).

At the same time, Moreno has also approached the leftist opposition. Most notably, he has included a representative of Ecuador's indigenous movement in his government, invited the CONAIE to his National Dialogue, and included two environmental questions in the referendum: whether to prohibit mining activities in protected areas, and whether to limit the area authorized for oil exploitation in the Yasuní National Park (see below; see also Labarthe and Saint-Upéry 2017: 30, 33; Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 27). These latter questions, which received massive support from the population (see below), were, however, also criticized as rather symbolic concessions. In general, President Moreno has continued his predecessor's emphasis on the massive extraction and export of Ecuador's mineral and fossil resources as a necessary evil, needed to fund the public investment and social spending that have characterized the post-neoliberal economic policies that have prevailed since Correa first took office in 2007.<sup>2</sup>

According to the latest available official data, the poverty rate increased slightly in 2015 (from 22.5% to 23.3%) but in 2016 fell again (to 22.9%). Extreme poverty increased between 2014 and 2016 (from 7.7% to 8.5% to 8.7%). Overall, however, poverty has been reduced significantly over the last 15 years (CEPAL 2018a: 91, 96). Income inequality—measured in terms of the Gini coefficient—fell only marginally between 2014 and 2016 (following significant reductions in the years before) (CEPAL 2018a: 44-45).

## Society

The first year of Moreno's presidency saw a remarkable change in the key sociopolitical cleavage that had increasingly deepened during the last years of the Correa government. Up until the runoff poll in which Moreno narrowly defeated his opponent Guillermo Lasso, Ecuadorian society had been characterized by a deep political polarization between the supporters and the detractors of the Citizens' Revolution. The rift was such that even representatives of the leftist and indigenous opposition to Correa officially supported the conservative former banker Lasso as the lesser evil (Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 13). With Moreno increasingly turning away from, then openly breaking with Correa, this has changed decidedly. The new cleavage now runs right through the (former) supporters of *Alianza PAIS*. To the extent that the "no" votes in the referendum can be seen as representing the persisting societal support for Correa and his faction, almost a third of the population belongs to this camp (see section III below). The remaining two-thirds now generally back President Moreno,<sup>3</sup> but this societal support is itself very fragmented. Given that almost

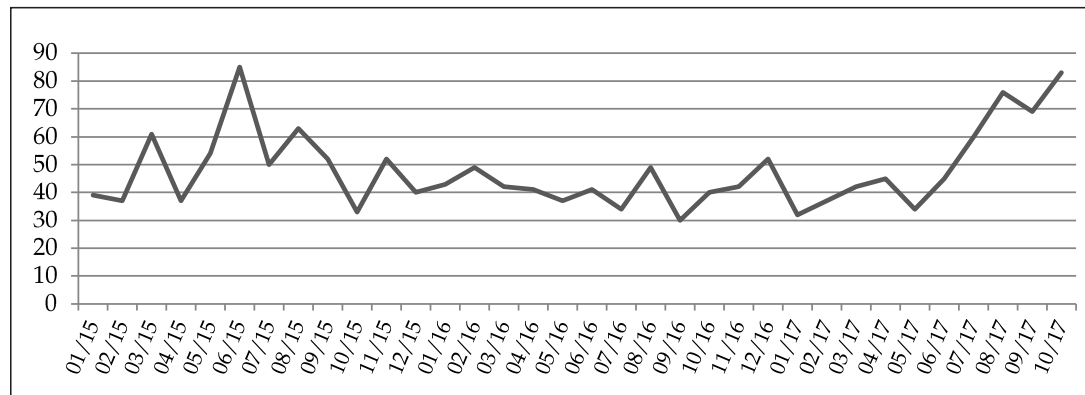
<sup>2</sup> On the economic policies pursued by the Correa government, see for instance Muñoz (2014), Ramírez (2016), and Weisbrot et al. (2017).

<sup>3</sup> According to opinion polls, since his elections, Moreno has received the support of between 66 and 77% of the population (CEDATOS 2018).

all of Ecuador’s political and societal organizations have supported Moreno in the referendum, the “yes” votes have come from all sides: from conservative and/or neoliberal critics of the Citizens’ Revolution, from supporters of the Morenist *Alianza Pais* faction, as well as from those who had turned against Correa’s authoritarian governing style and his extractivist policies from a leftist, environmentalist, and/or indigenous position (see Ramírez 2018; Wray 2018).

In this context, while 2017 has not seen the kind of mass protests that characterized the final years of the Correa government (Ibarra 2015), the overall number of sociopolitical conflicts has increased in the course of the year. According to conflict data collected by the *Centro Andino de Acción Popular* (CAAP), the number of conflicts rose almost continuously throughout the year (see Figure 2). In fact, October 2017 saw the highest number of conflicts (83) since June 2015 (85), when the Correa government’s plans to increase taxes on capital gains and inheritance provoked massive protests across Ecuador’s major cities (see Pilca 2015: 27; CAAP 2017: 27). Yet, it is important to emphasize that the pattern of sociopolitical conflicts in late 2017 was much more fragmented than it was in mid-2015 when the increase in protests was clearly attributable to the confrontation between those supporting and those opposing the government.

Figure 2. Sociopolitical conflicts: Ecuador 2015-2017



Source: CAAP/Ecuador Debate

## Politics

It is in the dimension of politics that the transition from Correa to Moreno has had the most obvious impact. The political strategy pursued by the Moreno government has basically combined two mutually reinforcing elements: the opening up towards the opposition in the party system as well as in the society at large, on the one hand, and the confrontation of the faction of Correístas within the governing *Alianza PAIS* party, on the other.

As regards the first strategy, President Moreno responded to the contested election by immediately starting to send friendly signals to the fragmented



opposition. The first key instrument in this regard was the National Dialogue convoked by President Moreno immediately after taking office. In fact, the *mesas de diálogo* established around mid-2017 included meetings with some of the groups that had been in open confrontation with the Correa government, such as the indigenous organization CONAIE or the owners of the country's most important private media outlets (see Labarthe and Saint-Upéry 2017: 30-31). Opinions, however, remained divided about whether this openness to dialogue really meant a willingness to change course on the part of the government. Such doubts were apparently confirmed at the end of the year, when an audio was leaked in which Moreno's General Secretary Eduardo Mangas emphasized, amongst other things, that the government would not "cede anything" to the opposition but had to enter into a dialogue "so that they feel heard." Mangas' entire statement on this issue, however, was more balanced and described the government's attempt to balance the aim to basically continue its political agenda with the perceived need to correct some "mistakes that have been made."<sup>4</sup>

In the rapidly escalating conflict within *Alianza PAIS*, the issue of corruption played a key role. As elsewhere in the region, in the context of the Odebrecht bribery scandal, corruption had already become a major issue in Ecuador before the 2017 elections. For the Moreno government, this meant both a significant risk and an opportunity. On the one hand, the corruption charges against important representatives of the "Citizens' Revolution" threatened to further undermine the legitimacy of the new government. The new president, therefore, arguably had little alternative but to show a willingness to seriously fight corruption. On the other hand, the corruption charges also provided a tool for Moreno that has enabled him to get rid of key Correístas in state institutions. The most prominent case concerned Jorge Glas. Glas had been vice president in Correa's last term as well during the first months of the Moreno presidency. In August 2017, Glas was suspended from his duties and later detained and finally sentenced to six years of imprisonment for taking \$13.5 million in bribes (BBC 2017a; Wray 2018: 8). The conviction of the vice president was, however, only the most high-profile case in a series of corruption scandals and proceedings. In the context of the Odebrecht scandal, for instance, Alecksey Mosquera, a former minister under Correa, was detained in April 2017 (and later sentenced to five years in prison); in June, then General Comptroller Carlos Pólit responded to ongoing impeachment proceedings in parliament by renouncing his office from Miami (he was later sentenced, in absentia, to six years in prison); in October, together with Jorge Glas, his uncle Ricardo Rivera was detained (and later sentenced to six years in prison) (see El Universo 2017b).

<sup>4</sup> See the transcript of the audio published by FocusEcuador (2017). As a consequence of the leak, which contained other controversial statements (see below), Eduardo Mangas had to resign his post in the presidency in early December 2017.

At the end of 2017, President Moreno claimed to be “horrified” by what he now called a “galloping corruption” during the Correa government (ABC 2017). This statement, while reflecting the definitive break between Moreno and his predecessor, also responded to the leaked audio of Moreno’s General Secretary. In his recorded statement, Mangas not only acknowledged that the problems with corruption under the Correa government had been serious, but also insinuated that the Moreno government’s emphasis on fighting corruption was primarily meant to counteract the ongoing anticorruption campaign led by non-state actors.<sup>5</sup> Be that as it may, the prosecution of government officials implicated in cases of corruption both dramatically deepened the split between Morenistas and Correístas in *Alianza PAIS* and helped the new president to gather support among (former) opposition groups and the general public in his confrontation with Correa.

These mutually reinforcing dynamics—the opening up towards the old opposition outside *Alianza PAIS* and the increasingly harsh confrontation with the new internal opposition within the governing party—culminated in the referendum of February 2018. Three of the seven questions posed to the population by Moreno were clearly aimed at winning the struggle against Correa (Ramírez 2018).<sup>6</sup> By reinstating the constitutional term limits for elected offices, which had been deleted by the previous legislative assembly in December 2015, Correa is effectively blocked from running again for the country’s presidency. In line with a second question, all those convicted of corruption are from now on barred from running for political office. This directly applies to former vice president Jorge Glas but, in the future, may also preclude Correa from returning into Ecuadorian politics in any official capacity (if he should also be convicted on corruption charges). Third, public approval for a reform of the *Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social* (CPCCS) has already allowed Moreno to replace Correísta loyalists on the council, which is responsible of appointing key institutions of control, including the Attorney General, the Comptroller General, the Judicial Council as well as the members of the National Electoral Council (see Wolff 2012: 189; Wray 2018).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> More specifically, Mangas said that the government would create the new institution to fight corruption—the *Frente de Lucha y Transparencia contra la Corrupción*—as a “counterweight” to the civic Anticorruption Commission (*Comisión Anticorrupción*), in order “to stop it” (“Porque había que frenarla [...]”) (FocusEcuador 2017). Another remark of Mangas that caused a public outcry—and added to harm the image of the new president—included a supposed acknowledgement that Moreno lost the elections.

<sup>6</sup> An additional contested issue concerned the fact that President Moreno convoked the referendum without the explicit endorsement by the Constitutional Court. From the perspective of Correa and his supporters, this was read as an unconstitutional move, while Moreno and his supporters argued that the president had sent the questions to the court which, however, did not respond within the 20-day deadline established by law (El Telégrafo 2017; see also Wray 2018: 8-9).

<sup>7</sup> In line with the proposal voted for in the referendum, the Ecuadorian parliament in February 2018 elected the members of a transitional CPCCS from lists proposed to the legislative assembly by President Moreno (see section IV below).



The split between Correa and Moreno has meant a significant change in the party system and, correspondingly, in parliament. Since 2006, Ecuador's traditionally highly fragmented party system had turned into a dominant-party system. While the country's traditional regional division between the coast, dominated by the economic powerhouse Guayaquil, and the highlands, centered on the capital Quito, had usually meant that individual political parties had their strength either in the *Costa* or in the *Sierra*, *Alianza PAIS* managed to create a nation-wide presence throughout the country, acting as a hegemonic political force with the unusual capacity to win majorities across all regions (see Pachano 2010: 305-309; Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 7).<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, and supported by an electoral system that benefits majoritarian parties, *Alianza PAIS* temporarily achieved a two-thirds majority in the national parliament (Meléndez and Moncagatta 2017: 430).

With the split between Correístas and Morenistas, this hegemony is clearly over. In the newly elected legislative majority, *Alianza PAIS* has lost the narrow majority it had gained in the 2017 parliamentary elections. In January 2018, 28 legislators left *Alianza PAIS* and formed the oppositional group *Revolución Ciudadana* (El Comercio 2018b). As a consequence, the governing party had to rely on changing majorities (El Universo 2018b). At least in this regard, Ecuadorian politics has returned to the pre-Correa era in which presidents usually had to construct and retain fragile coalitions in a fragmented parliament in order to enable legislative majorities and prevent their own deposition. At the same time, the societal base of *Alianza PAIS* has most probably shrunk even more significantly. It is hard to say precisely how much of the original constituency of *Alianza PAIS* still exists, but the results of the referendum suggest that at least half of the voters that had supported Moreno in the presidential elections later sided with Correa (see below).

### III. ELECTORAL RESULTS

Since early 2017, Ecuador has seen four important votes: the parliamentary elections of 19 February, the simultaneous first round of the presidential elections, the runoff vote on 2 April, and the referendum on 4 February 2018.<sup>9</sup>

The results of the general elections of February 2017 were reported in last year's Anuario of the *Revista de Ciencia Política* (Meléndez and Moncagatta 2017: 429-431; see also Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 5-6). With a view to the parliamentary elections, suffice to say that the governing political movement *Alianza PAIS* lost

<sup>8</sup> Given its relative small share in terms of population, Ecuador's third big region, the *Amazonía*, usually plays a minor role in this regional contest.

<sup>9</sup> Simultaneous with the general (parliamentary and presidential) elections in February 2017, a referendum (*consulta popular*) also took place in which the governmental proposal to prohibit political office-holders and civil servants from holding money or property in tax havens was approved by 55.5% (Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 6).

its previous two-thirds majority in the legislative assembly but defended its absolute majority (winning 74 out of 137 seats). The electoral alliance between Guillermo Lasso's political movement *Creando Oportunidades* (CREO) and the small party of Quito's Mayor Mauricio Rodas, *Sociedad Unida Más Acción* (SUMA), expanded its position as the most important oppositional force. Together with the traditional conservative party *Partido Social Cristiano* (PSC) and its offshoot movement *Madera de Guerrero*, the center-right opposition controls roughly a third of the seats. Smaller parties include the indigenous *Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik* and the revived social-democratic *Izquierda Democrática* (ID) on the left, the *Partido Sociedad Patriótica* of former president Lucio Gutiérrez on the right, as well as minor parties and local movements.<sup>10</sup> As mentioned above, the governing party has, in the meantime, lost its majority, with 28 Correísta legislators forming the new group *Revolución Ciudadana* (El Comercio 2018b).

In the first round of the presidential elections, Moreno received 39.36% of the vote. He, thereby, outperformed his main contender Lasso by more than 10 percentage points but narrowly missed the 40% threshold necessary to win directly (Meléndez and Moncagatta 2017: 429-430). While this result should have boosted the public confidence in the neutrality of the National Electoral Court (CNE), the runoff was characterized by an unusual degree of contestation (see Celi 2017: 5). Based on exit polls which, in part, suggested a victory for the opposition candidate, but without being able to present any kind of evidence of fraud, the Lasso campaign openly challenged the electoral results reported by the CNE and mobilized protests (Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 21-22; Ospina 2017a: 2-3). Following a partial recount that confirmed the results, Lasso and his followers became increasingly isolated and the protests quickly tapered off. Figure 3 summarizes the final results. When disaggregating the national results, it becomes clear that the government's stronghold is the coastal area in general and "zones with scarce resources, rural areas and those zones in the big cities—such as Quito and Guayaquil—that are undergoing processes of urbanization" (Celi 2017: 6; see also Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 7-8; Ospina 2017a: 3-4).

On 10 July 2017, Lenín Moreno officially took over the presidential mandate from Rafael Correa. Upon his departure to Belgium on that same day, Correa delivered a farewell statement at Quito airport that already signaled the mounting tensions with his successor: "It is obvious that, on the second of April, we have defeated the opposition, but I am not sure whether the Citizens' Revolution has won" (quoted in Wray 2018: 6; translated by the author).

<sup>10</sup> See Meléndez and Moncagatta (2017: 430-431) as well as the website of the legislative assembly at [www.asambleanacional.gob.ec](http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ec).

Figure 3. Results of the runoff election on 2 April 2017

CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENCY/VICE PRESIDENCY ( <i>BINOMIOS</i> )	SHARE (IN %)	NO. OF VOTES
Lenín Moreno/Jorge Glas (Alianza PAIS)	51.16%	5,062,018
Guillermo Lasso/Andrés Páez (CREO/SUMA)	48.84%	4,833,389

Source: Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE)

Based on a National Dialogue that he had started right after assuming power, President Moreno identified seven questions that the general public should be asked to vote on. Details of the individual questions were criticized by experts and political parties, but in general almost the entire range of Ecuador's sociopolitical forces called for a "yes" vote to all questions. As a notable exception, the Correístas fervently opposed the entire project and, in particular, the constitutional changes envisaged by questions 1, 2 and 3 (see Wray 2018). On the one hand, the results, documented in Figure 4, signified an important victory of Moreno against Correa. On the other hand, however, while the "yes" vote was the result of support from diverse factions and could, therefore, not simply be read as a support for Moreno, the almost 36% of "no" votes on the question of reelection (question 2) demonstrated the persistent support for Correa and his followers. Still, according to opinion polls, since his inauguration, between 66% and 77% of the population have approved of President Moreno's administration; in January 2018, the share was at 68.6%, equaling the support of Correa during his first year in office (CEDATOS 2018).<sup>11</sup>

Figure 4. Results of the referendum on 4 February 2018<sup>12</sup>

No.	QUESTION	YES	No
1	¿Está usted de acuerdo con que se enmiende la Constitución de la República del Ecuador, para que se sancione a toda persona condenada por actos de corrupción con su inhabilitación para participar en la vida política del país, y con la pérdida de sus bienes, según lo dispuesto en el Anexo 1?	73.71%	26.29%

<sup>11</sup> In the final two years of the Correa governments, his approval ratings according to CEDATOS (2018) had gone down to between 40% and 50%.

<sup>12</sup> Technically speaking, the first five questions were part of a constitutional referendum (*referéndum*), while the final two questions represented a popular consultation (*consulta popular*).

No.	QUESTION	Yes	No
2	¿Para garantizar el principio de alternabilidad, está usted de acuerdo con enmendar la Constitución de la República del Ecuador para que todas las autoridades de elección popular puedan ser reelectas por una sola vez para el mismo cargo, recuperando el mandato de la Constitución de Montecristi y dejando sin efecto la reelección indefinida aprobada mediante enmienda por la Asamblea Nacional el 3 de diciembre de 2015, según lo establecido en el Anexo 2?	64.20%	35.80%
3	¿Está usted de acuerdo con enmendar la Constitución de la República del Ecuador para reestructurar al Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social, así como dar por terminado el periodo constitucional de sus actuales miembros, y que el Consejo que asuma transitoriamente sus funciones tenga la potestad de evaluar el desempeño de las autoridades cuya designación le corresponde, pudiendo, de ser el caso, anticipar la terminación de sus periodos, de acuerdo al Anexo 3?	63.08%	36.92%
4	¿Está usted de acuerdo con enmendar la Constitución de la República del Ecuador para que nunca prescriban los delitos sexuales en contra de niñas, niños y adolescentes, según el Anexo 4?	73.53%	26.47%
5	¿Está usted de acuerdo con enmendar la Constitución de la República del Ecuador para que se prohíba sin excepción la minería metálica en todas sus etapas, en áreas protegidas, zonas intangibles y centros urbanos, de conformidad con lo establecido en el Anexo 5?	68.62%	31.38%
6	¿Está usted de acuerdo con que se derogue la Ley Orgánica para Evitar la Especulación sobre el Valor de las Tierras y Fijación de Tributos, conocida como "Ley de Plusvalía", según el Anexo 1?	63.10%	36.90%
7	¿Está usted de acuerdo en incrementar la zona intangible en al menos 50.000 hectáreas y reducir el área de explotación petrolera autorizada por la Asamblea Nacional en el Parque Nacional Yasuní de 1.030 hectáreas a 300 hectáreas?	67.31%	32.69%

Source: El Universo (2018a) and Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE)

#### IV. THE EXECUTIVE, THE LEGISLATURE, AND THE SEPARATION OF POWERS

##### The Executive

When newly elected President Moreno appointed his first cabinet, its composition was generally perceived as signaling the expected combination of continuity and change (see Labarthe and Saint-Upéry 2017: 30). On the one hand, the majority of the ministers had already held official positions during the Correa government. On the other hand, the cabinet included people with ties to the business sector as well as to indigenous and social movements (El Comercio 2017a). In particular, the group of ministers in charge of economic policies (*frente económico*) has been characterized by “a strong component of professionals coming from the private sector” (El Comercio 2017b). Yet, non-*Alianza PAIS* members of the cabinet also included people with ties to more progressive and social sectors (El Comercio 2017e; Ortiz and Burbano 2017: 27). Furthermore, Moreno appointed a series of ministers from *Alianza PAIS* that represent the progressive “old guard” that had played an important role during the first phase of the Citizens’ Revolution.<sup>13</sup> As a first sign of austerity, President Moreno decided to dissolve the six coordinating ministries (*ministerios coordinadores*) which had been introduced by Correa. Later changes in the cabinet have mostly reflected the replacement of people identified with the Correa government. Figure 5 summarizes the changing composition of the cabinet.

Figure 5. Lenín Moreno’s Cabinet: Ministers and National Secretaries

Presidencia	Lenín Moreno Garcés
Vicepresidencia	Jorge Glas Espinel (until October 2017), María Vicuña Muñoz (since October 2017)
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana	María Espinosa Garcés
Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas	Carlos de la Torre Muñoz (until March 2018), María Viteri Acaiturri (since March 2018)
Ministerio del Interior	César Navas Vera
Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social	José Espinel Molina (until December 2017), Lourdes Cordero Molina (since December 2017)
Ministerio de Justicia, Derechos Humanos y Cultos	Rosana Alvarado Carrión

<sup>13</sup> These included, for instance, Augusto Barrera, Virgilio Hernández, Rosana Alvarado, Paola Pabon and Fander Falconí (El Comercio 2017c).

Ministerio de Defensa Nacional	Miguel Carvajal Aguirre (until September 2017), Marco Zambrano Restrepo (since September 2017)
Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería	Vanessa Cordero Ahiman (until October 2017), Rubén Flores Agreda (since October 2017)
Ministerio de Acuicultura y Pesca	Ana Drouet Salcedo
Ministerio de Telecomunicaciones	Guillermo León Santacruz
Ministerio de Comercio Exterior e Inversiones	Pablo Campana Sáenz
Ministerio de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda	María Vicuña Muñoz (until January 2018), Adrián Sandoya Unamuno (since January 2018)
Ministerio de Salud Pública	María Espinosa Serrano
Ministerio de Turismo	Enrique Ponce de León Román
Ministerio de Electricidad y Energía Renovable	José Cadena Mosquera (until December 2017), Elsy Parodi Ocaña (since December 2017)
Ministerio de Minería	Javier Córdova Unda (until January 2018), Rebeca Illescas Jiménez (since February 2018)
Ministerio de Educación	Fander Falconí Benítez
Ministerio de Industrias y Productividad	Eva García Fabre
Ministerio de Hidrocarburos	Carlos Pérez García
Ministerio del Ambiente	Tarsicio Granizo Tamayo
Ministerio de Trabajo	Raúl Ledesma Huerta
Ministerio de Cultura y Patrimonio	Raúl Pérez Torres
Ministerio de Deporte	Andrea Sotomayor Andrade
Ministerio de Transporte y Obras Públicas	Paúl Granda López
Secretario de la Presidencia	Eduardo Mangas (until December 2017), Andrés Mideros Mora (since December 2017)
Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo	Andrés Mideros Mora (until December 2017), Etzon Romo Torres (since December 2017)
Secretaría Nacional de Gestión de la Política	Paola Pabón Caranqui (until August 2017), Miguel Carvajal Aguirre (since September 2017)
Secretaría Nacional de Comunicación	Álex Mora Moya (until February 2018), Andrés Michelena (since February 2018)
Secretaría General Jurídica de la Presidencia	Johana Pesántez Benítez

Source: El Comercio (2017a, 2018a) and official governmental websites ([www.presidencia.gob.ec](http://www.presidencia.gob.ec))



## The Legislature, the Judiciary and the Separation of Power

During his last term in office (2013-2017), President Correa had a firm grip on all the powers of the state at the national level. *Alianza PAIS* held a two-thirds majority in the legislative assembly and all important judicial organs were generally considered to be close to the government (Rojas and Llanos-Escobar 2016: 166-167). This situation has changed significantly since Correa has left the presidency. Given the governing party's loss of, first, the two-thirds majority and, then, also of the absolute majority in the legislative assembly, Ecuador's parliament has once again become a central arena of the political struggle in which political parties and individual legislators negotiate alliances, laws, posts and resources as well as, in the extreme case, over the future of the government.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of writing, the parties in parliament were struggling to find the necessary majorities in order to restructure the leadership positions of the parliamentary commissions, which still reflected the original majority of the united *Alianza PAIS* faction (El Comercio 2018c). A first step in this process was the election of Elizabeth Cabez as the new president of the legislative assembly. In March 2018, Cabezas was elected by a parliamentary majority that included the remaining faction of *Alianza PAIS*, but also a series of opposition parties such as PSC, SUMA, and Pachakutik (El Universo 2018b). Cabezas replaced José Serrano, who was removed from office following a leaked audio in which he was caught talking over the telephone to former Comptroller Carlos Pólit, who fled to the US to elude corruption charges (see above), about the need to take down Prosecutor Carlos Baca.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the judiciary, the referendum has likewise paved the way for a reshuffle of personnel. In late February, parliament elected the seven members of the transitional Council of Citizen Participation (CPCCS), which will evaluate all authorities that are appointed by the CPCCS until a new permanent council is elected in March 2019. The obvious aim is to replace Correístas in the judiciary, as well as in other institutions of horizontal accountability, with people friendly to the new government. Given that *Alianza PAIS* no longer has a majority in parliament, this is very likely to increase the independence of these institutions vis-à-vis the executive and, hence, to improve institutional checks and balances.

<sup>14</sup> According to Ecuador's constitution, the legislative assembly can remove the president from office—just as the president can dissolve parliament. In both cases, new legislative and presidential elections will be convened ahead of time.

<sup>15</sup> The original quote from Serrano reads: "[...] definitivamente tenemos que bajarle al, no nos queda más, él no puede ser Fiscal hasta finales de este año" (El Comercio 2018f). The audio was made public by the Prosecutor Baca himself, a contested move that also led to Baca's removal by the legislative assembly.

## The Opposition

The fragmented opposition, which had united against Correa as the common enemy, has generally supported Moreno in his conflict with Correa. This has been most explicit in the case of the referendum. When it comes to decision-making in parliament, however, the picture is rather fluid. In addition to the Correísta *Revolución Ciudadana* faction, CREO has tended to act in opposition to the government, whereas the rest has had a rather reconciliatory attitude. The camp of center-right forces has also been characterized by internal rivalries, in particular between CREO and the PSC. On their part, the oppositional center-left parties have mostly welcomed the changes initiated by the Moreno government. At the same time, they see the crisis of the governing party as an opportunity to regain some of the serious losses that they suffered during the years of hegemonic rule of *Alianza PAIS* (El Comercio 2017f).

## V. THE STATE AND QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

According to the 2018 Freedom in the World report, Ecuador features among the six countries worldwide with the largest one-year gains in 2017. As Freedom House (2018: 11) summarizes:

Under new president Lenín Moreno, Ecuador turned away from the personalized and often repressive rule of his predecessor, Rafael Correa. Moreno has eased pressure on the media, promoted greater engagement with civil society, proposed the restoration of term limits, and supported anticorruption efforts, including a case against his own vice president. Moreno had been Correa’s chosen successor, but his unexpectedly reformist stance once again demonstrated the potential for regular elections and transfers of power to disrupt authoritarian entrenchment.

A closer look reveals, however, that the actual improvements as reported by Freedom House are modest at best: Ecuador improved by one point in the “civil liberties” ranking. The country, thereby, returned to the status quo that it had retained throughout the 2000s—both before Correa and under his presidency—until 2015. In general, Freedom House has continuously categorized Ecuador as a partially free electoral democracy.

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index (2018: 25) likewise observes gradual changes while emphasizing important progress:

Ecuador experienced the most significant improvement in Latin America in 2017, moving from “hybrid regime” to a “flawed democracy” in the 2017 Democracy Index. The upgrade reflects efforts by the newly inaugurated president, Lenín Moreno, since taking office in May 2017 to undo some of the more controversial encroachments on the rule of law

and freedom of expression made by his predecessor, Rafael Correa (2007-17).

It is important to add two observations. First, it is difficult to see how the changes in the style of governing and the rather modest actual changes in institutions and laws that have accompanied the transition from Correa to Moreno can actually be read as implying a change in the political regime (from hybrid to democratic). Second, in contrast to what the above statement may suggest, the EIU has actually reported gradual improvements in the democratic quality of Ecuador's political regime throughout the Correa years: from 5.64 (2006) to 5.87 (2013-2015), with only a minor reduction to 5.81 (2016) before the most recent increase to 6.02 (2017).

Systematically speaking, we can identify three changes that have arguably made Ecuadorian democracy in the first year of the Moreno presidency more liberal than it was at the end of the Correa government. First, the much less confrontational rhetoric (against government critics in civil society and the media) has meant a certain liberalization of the public sphere. According to the NGO Fundamedios (2017), "aggressions against the freedom of expression" have seen a significant reduction since Moreno has taken power. Second, improvements also concern the freedoms of association and assembly. Most notably, in this regard, the new president has repealed the contested decrees 16 and 739. The new decree 193 maintains the overall approach to regulating civil society organizations (CSOs), but softens some of the restrictions, for instance, by easing bureaucratic hurdles, reducing state control over CSOs, and abrogating the clause that had enabled the dissolution of organizations that threaten "the internal or external security of the state" or "public peace" (Plan V 2017). In November 2017, the government restituted the legal status of the NGO *Fundación Pachamama*, which had been closed in 2013 (El Comercio 2018d). Furthermore, the new president has pardoned a series of indigenous activists sentenced for engaging in protests. Third, the division of *Alianza PAIS* has de facto improved institutional checks and balances: the government is no longer controlling parliament; and, given the persisting influence of Correístas in the courts and tribunals, the judiciary is no longer considered to be as close to the government. As evidenced by the appointment of the transitory Council of Citizen Participation CPCCS, Moreno cannot simply replace Correa loyalists with people close to him because he needs oppositional support in parliament.

A series of scholars have argued that Ecuador's political system under Correa had turned from a democracy to a competitive authoritarian regime (see Levitsky and Loxton 2013; Basabe-Serrano and Martínez 2014; Montúfar 2015; De la Torre 2016; Sanchez-Sibony 2017). From this perspective, the Moreno government has set the country on the path towards a return to democracy, if it has not already achieved such a return (see De la Torre 2018). Yet, political developments during the Citizens' Revolution have been much more complex than such a simple black-and-white picture suggests. While Ecuador during the Correa years has

certainly become less liberal in certain key aspects,<sup>16</sup> it has also become more democratic in other regards. Generally speaking, under President Correa, the Ecuadorian state has significantly increased its capacity and relative autonomy to take political decisions and implement policies in the name of the people (Bowen 2015; Ramírez 2016).<sup>17</sup> While this is frequently criticized as an indicator of populism, it is also a very basic condition of democracy: that a candidate or a political party which succeeds in democratic elections is, afterwards, also capable of implementing campaign promises without the undue influence of well-organized special interests. In many ways, the Correa government has used this capacity in order to respond better to the interests and values of the majority of the population than any other government since the establishment of democracy in Ecuador. To be sure, it has done so in a rather technocratic, top-down manner (De la Torre 2013), and the sustainability of the socioeconomic improvements is also far from guaranteed (see above). But the fact remains that important parts of the population, and of the popular sectors, in particular, have seen themselves represented by Correa and *Alianza PAIS* (Silva 2017: 103-107). In terms of a social conception of democracy, the Correa government has significantly improved access to the state and public services, expanded social policies, and strengthened economic and social rights (see Wolff 2012; Ramírez 2016; Weisbrot et al. 2017).<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, the empirical legitimacy of (or trust in) the democratic institutions has generally improved under the Correa government, as has the support for democracy and the satisfaction with the functioning of democracy.<sup>19</sup>

It is certainly too early to tell, but there is a clear risk that the Moreno government might result in setbacks on some of these dimensions. In particular, the new openness of the government to all kinds of organized interests, including the business sector, might well signal a return to the kind of quasi-corporatist logic that predominated Ecuador in the pre-Correa era—a return that would once again reduce the responsiveness of the political regime to those parts of the popular sectors that have benefited from some (if rather passive) incorporation under Correa (see Wolff 2016: 126-129; Silva 2017: 103-107). In any case, despite having apparently defeated Correa for the time being, President Moreno heads a government that is decidedly weak in many regards. Politically, he is

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Conaghan (2017) and the annual contributions to this Anuario (e.g., Basabe-Serrano and Martínez 2014; Freidenberg 2012; Meléndez and Moncagatta 2017; Pachano 2010; Rojas and Llanos-Escobar 2016).

<sup>17</sup> For a critical analysis, see Andrade and Nicholls (2017).

<sup>18</sup> See also the in-depth study, from a critical perspective, edited by Francisco Muñoz Jaramillo (2014).

<sup>19</sup> In recent years (2015-2017), support for democracy in Ecuador as measured by *Latinobarómetro* (2017) has been around 70% (Latin American average: 53-56%). Satisfaction with democracy reached 51% in 2017 (third only to Uruguay and Nicaragua; Latin American average: 30%). Generally, most of the numbers had gone down during the final years of the Correa presidency—while remaining higher than in the pre-Correa era—and have seen a re-increase with the transition to Moreno. In the most recent *Latinobarómetro* poll (from June-August 2017), for instance, trust in the government in Ecuador was at 39% (Latin American average: 25%), trust in parliament at 30% (Latin America: 22%), and trust in political parties at 20% (Latin America: 15%). The share of respondents that hold the view that Ecuador is governed in the interest of the entire people most recently increased slightly from 35 (2016) to 38% (2017) (Latin American average: 21%).

dependent on the opposition, which is dominated by center-right parties; vis-à-vis society, he has made promises in all directions (from the business elite to the indigenous movement) and is, at the same time, bound by his core constituency, which has elected him as the progressive alternative to the neoliberal “counter-revolution”. Economically, his room to maneuver is clearly restrained by the economic situation and the correspondingly hard budget constraints. Against the background of the Correa era, during which an excessive concentration of power in the executive had raised serious concerns, this may seem like positive news for democracy. Yet, as the history of Ecuadorian politics before Correa suggests, such a weakness generally does not bode well, neither for the legitimacy nor for the performance of democracy.

In sum, Ecuadorian democracy since 2017 has already become, once again, more liberal. But this liberalization of the political regime might well combine with de-democratizing tendencies in other dimensions. The only thing that seems clear is that the struggle over democracy will continue, and will continue to include a struggle over the very question of what democracy is actually supposed to be.

## VI. CONCLUSION

For those who look at Correa’s legacy and Moreno’s break with his predecessor from a liberal perspective, the situation is clear. Politically, the changes initiated by Moreno in the course of the year 2017 have meant a process of re-liberalizing a democracy that, during the Correa years, had turned increasingly illiberal even to the point of becoming authoritarian. Economically, Moreno is credited with starting to backtrack on what is seen as “irresponsible” or at least unsustainable, state-centric economic policies. And with a view to Ecuadorian society, the new president has effectively reduced the intensity of social conflict, in particular by dissolving the polarization between followers and opponents of the government that had been manifested, for instance, during the brief wave of post-electoral protests.

Yet, there is also another, more complex reading of the current situation in Ecuador. Such an alternative reading (a) takes into account what “liberal democracy” and “liberal economics” have actually meant in the pre-Correa era and (b) sees the legacy of the “Citizens’ Revolution” as a decidedly ambivalent one. From such a perspective, the Moreno government faces the challenge of preserving the remarkable political, social, and economic progress that Ecuador has experienced during the ten years of the Correa government, while simultaneously trying to correct the increasingly authoritarian nature, socially polarizing effects, and economically unsustainable features of Correa’s way of implementing the agenda of the Citizens’ Revolution. From such a perspective, the Moreno government confronts the complicated task of combining change and continuity in a rather delicate balancing act:



- to implement political reforms that reduce overly restrictive regulations (of the media, of civil society organizations, etc.) and the overconcentration of power in the executive (by reducing de facto governmental control over the judiciary and other entities horizontal accountability) without returning to the type of formally liberal regime in which politics was basically shaped by the quasi-corporatist negotiation between opportunistic political parties and different kinds of interest groups;
- to adapt economic policies to the context of relatively low oil prices while retaining the socioeconomic gains realized during the Correa years and avoiding to renege on the promise to continue—if not deepen—the post-neoliberal economic and social policies of his predecessor for which Moreno was elected; and
- to re-open the spaces for political dialog and plural societal controversies without returning to the rather elitist kind of pluralism in which elites and middle classes are once again happy but large parts of the population remain factually excluded.

At the time of writing, it is too early to tell whether the Moreno government has the political will and the capacity to successfully deal with these difficult challenges. What is clear, however, is that neither the political nor the economic context bode particularly well for such an attempt to fundamentally reorient the Citizens' Revolution without abandoning its overall thrust.

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